

**AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS:**

The following is the status of the claims of the above-captioned application, as amended.

Claims 1-26 (Canceled).

Claims 27-40 (Canceled).

Claim 41 (Currently amended). A method for enhancing secretion of a protein of interest, the method comprising expressing said protein in a progeny cell derived from a parent cell, according to claim 27 wherein

a) the progeny cell comprises at least one gene encoding metallo regulated gene A (MrqA) protein with an amino acid sequence which is at least 90% identical to the amino acid sequence shown in SEQ ID NO:2 and/or a DNA segment operably linked with the encoding gene, wherein said gene and/or DNA segment is manipulated with respect to the parent cell; or

b) the progeny cell comprises two or more copies of a gene encoding MrqA protein with an amino acid sequence which is at least 90% identical to the amino acid sequence shown in SEQ ID NO:2,

wherein the progeny cell produces greater amounts of MrqA protein with an amino acid sequence which is at least 90% identical to the amino acid sequence shown in SEQ ID NO:2 than the parent cell, and wherein the progeny cell produces greater amounts of protein of interest than the parent cell.

Claim 42-45 (Canceled).

Claim 46 (Currently Amended). A method for producing a protein of interest, comprising the steps of:

- a) cultivating a progeny cell derived from a parent cell, wherein ~~as defined in claim 28;~~
  - a) the progeny cell comprises at least one gene encoding metallo regulated gene A (MrqA) protein with an amino acid sequence which is at least 90% identical to the amino acid sequence shown in SEQ ID NO:2 and/or a DNA segment operably linked with the encoding gene, wherein said gene and/or DNA segment is manipulated with respect to the parent cell; or
  - b) the progeny cell comprises two or more copies of a gene encoding MrqA protein with an amino acid sequence which is at least 90% identical to the amino acid sequence shown in SEQ ID NO:2,
- wherein the progeny cell produces greater amounts of MrqA protein with an amino acid sequence which is at least 90% identical to the amino acid sequence shown in SEQ ID NO:2 than the parent cell, and wherein the progeny cell produces greater amounts of a protein of interest than the parent cell;
- and
- b) recovering the protein.

Claim 47 (New). A method in accordance with claim 41, wherein the progeny cell is a bacterial cell.

Claim 48 (New). A method in accordance with claim 41, wherein the progeny cell is of a species chosen from the group consisting of *Bacillus alkalophilus*, *Bacillus amyloliquefaciens*, *Bacillus brevis*, *Bacillus circulans*, *Bacillus coagulans*, *Bacillus lautus*, *Bacillus lentus*, *Bacillus licheniformis*, *Bacillus stearothermophilus*, *Bacillus subtilis*, and *Bacillus thuringiensis*.

Claim 49 (New). A method in accordance with claim 41, wherein said protein of interest is homologous or heterologous.

Claim 50 (New). A method in accordance with claim 41, wherein said protein is a protease, a lipase, a cutinase, an amylase, a galactosidase, a pullulanase, a cellulase, a glucose isomerase, a protein disulphide isomerase, a CGT'ase (cyclodextrin gluconotransferase), a phytase, a glucose oxidase, a glucosyl transferase, lactase, bilirubin oxidase, a xylanase, an antigenic microbial or protozoan protein, a bacterial protein toxin, a microbial surface protein, or a viral protein.

Claim 51 (New). A method in accordance with claim 41, wherein the MrgA protein comprises an amino acid sequence which is at least 95% identical to the amino acid sequence shown in SEQ ID NO: 2.

Claim 52 (New). A method in accordance with claim 41, wherein the MrgA protein or comprises the amino acid sequence shown in SEQ ID NO: 2.

Claim 53 (New). A method in accordance with claim 41, wherein the progeny cell comprises at least one exogenous copy of a polynucleotide encoding MrgA protein comprising an amino acid sequence which is at least 95% identical to the amino acid sequence shown in SEQ ID NO: 2.

Claim 54 (New). A method in accordance with claim 41, wherein the progeny cell comprises at least one exogenous copy of a polynucleotide encoding MrgA protein comprising the amino acid sequence shown in SEQ ID NO: 2.

Claim 55 (New). A method in accordance with claim 41, wherein the progeny cell comprises at least one exogenous copy of a polynucleotide, which:

a) comprises a polynucleotide sequence which is at least 90% identical to the sequence shown in SEQ ID NO: 1; or

b) hybridizes with the sequence shown in SEQ ID NO: 1, under medium stringency conditions.

Claim 56 (New). A method in accordance with claim 41, wherein the progeny cell comprises at least one exogenous copy of a gene encoding the MrgA protein transcribed from one or more heterologous and/or artificial promoter.

Claim 57 (New). A method in accordance with claim 41, wherein the progeny cell comprises at least one exogenous copy of a gene encoding the MrgA protein integrated into the genome of the cell.

Claim 58 (New). A method in accordance with claim 41, wherein the progeny cell comprises at least one exogenous copy of a gene encoding the MrgA protein present on an extra-chromosomal construct.

Claim 59 (New). A method in accordance with claim 46, wherein the progeny cell is a bacterial cell.

Claim 60 (New). A method in accordance with claim 46, wherein the progeny cell is of a species chosen from the group consisting of *Bacillus alkalophilus*, *Bacillus amyloliquefaciens*, *Bacillus brevis*, *Bacillus circulans*, *Bacillus coagulans*, *Bacillus lautus*, *Bacillus lentus*, *Bacillus licheniformis*, *Bacillus stearothermophilus*, *Bacillus subtilis*, and *Bacillus thuringiensis*.

Claim 61 (New). A method in accordance with claim 46, wherein said protein of interest is homologous or heterologous.

Claim 62 (New). A method in accordance with claim 46, wherein said protein is a protease, a lipase, a cutinase, an amylase, a galactosidase, a pullulanase, a cellulase, a glucose isomerase, a protein disulphide isomerase, a CGT'ase (cyclodextrin gluconotransferase), a phytase, a glucose oxidase, a glucosyl transferase, lactase, bilirubin oxidase, a xylanase, an antigenic microbial or protozoan protein, a bacterial protein toxin, a microbial surface protein, or a viral protein.

Claim 63 (New). A method in accordance with claim 46, wherein the MrgA protein comprises an amino acid sequence which is at least 95% identical to the amino acid sequence shown in SEQ ID NO: 2.

Claim 64 (New). A method in accordance with claim 46, wherein the MrgA protein or comprises the amino acid sequence shown in SEQ ID NO: 2.

Claim 65 (New). A method in accordance with claim 46, wherein the progeny cell comprises at least one exogenous copy of a polynucleotide encoding MrgA protein comprising an amino acid sequence which is at least 95% identical to the amino acid sequence shown in SEQ ID NO: 2.